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ABSTRACT

Smart Start is a comprehensive public-private initiative to help all North Carolina children enter school healthy and ready to succeed, and provides children from birth to age five access to high-quality and affordable child care, health care, and other critical services. This document comprises the first two issues of "Smart Start News," a newsletter detailing project activities and accomplishments. The May 1999 issue includes articles on: the receipt of the 1998-99 Innovations in American Government Award; the Smart Start Web site; a state initiative to expand programs helping with child caregivers' health care costs and salary bonuses; programs illustrating collaboration; characteristics of quality child care; recent findings from Smart Start impact studies; needs and challenges of Smart Start communities; the availability of parent materials; ways to assist in children's intellectual development; and vision screenings. The fall 1999 issue includes articles on: initiatives to introduce advocacy and volunteer efforts into Smart Start; state family support initiatives; state health insurance plan; additional recent findings from Smart Start impact studies; private sector child care; child care license standards; Smart Start partnerships around the state; and 1999 local Smart Start award winners. (KB)

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Smart Start News
Spring and Fall 1999

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Smart Start News

North Carolina Partnership for Children

May 1999

Smart Start Recognized for National Award

L to R: Monica Harris, Ashley Thrift, Karen Ponder, Stephanie Fanjul, and Debby Bryant received the award from David Gergen during a ceremony in Washington, D.C.

Smart Start, North Carolina's premier early childhood initiative, has received the 1998-99 Innovations in American Government Award. This award is given annually by the Ford Foundation and Harvard University and honors states' efforts to solve their most pressing problems.

The Innovations in American Government Awards program honors the top state initiatives that address the most significant problems facing government. Smart Start will receive $100,000 as a result of this award. The National Selection Committee for the Innovations Awards is composed of former elected officials, private industry leaders and journalists, and is chaired by David Gergen, former advisor to four presidents and current editor at large at U.S. News & World Report.

The Innovations in American Government Awards are funded by the Ford Foundation and administered by the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University, in partnership with the Council for Excellence in Government. The Innovations in American Government Awards received more than 1,400 applications in 1998. The field was narrowed down to 97 semi-finalists, then 25 finalists.

Since the Innovations program began in 1986, the Ford Foundation has awarded grants totaling $13.3 million to 115 winners and 90 finalists. More than 85 percent of the programs receiving Innovations Awards have been replicated.

Smart Start is now serving children and families in all 100 counties - but not at full funding levels.

Since Smart Start began it has helped more than 130,000 children get the quality care they need. More than 26,000 child care teachers have benefited from education and training; more than 121,000 children have received preventive health care through screenings; and more than 77,000 parents have received education and family support.

Smart Start

Smart Start is a comprehensive public-private initiative to help all North Carolina children enter school healthy and ready to succeed. Smart Start programs and services provide children 0-5 access to high-quality and affordable child care, health care, and other critical services.

Smart Start was launched in 1993 by Gov. Jim Hunt and reaches children during the most critical years of development. Our goal is to ensure that every child in North Carolina has this opportunity for a brighter future.

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www.smartstart-nc.org

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U.S. News & World Report Editor Sees Smart Start in Action

David Gergen, editor at large of U.S. News & World Report and chairman of the Innovations in American Government Selection Committee, joined Gov. Jim Hunt at KidWorks Child Care Center in Raleigh to see Smart Start in action and to participate in a roundtable discussion with North Carolina's business leaders about the role of the business community in Smart Start's success.

"Smart Start is such an important program and one I take particular pride in as a native North Carolinian," said Gergen. "This program is not only one of the most innovative programs in the country, it is serving as a model for other communities across North Carolina and across the country."

A Durham native, Gergen has served in the White House as an adviser to presidents Nixon, Ford, Reagan, and Clinton. Most recently, he served in the Clinton Administration, first as counselor to the president and then as special adviser to the president and the secretary of state. He currently serves as editor at large of U.S. News & World Report and as a regular conversationalist on the PBS News Hour with Jim Leher.

"I am so proud that North Carolina, more than any other state, understands the importance of the first five years of a child's life," said Hunt. "Because of Smart Start, and the contributions made by North Carolina's business community, our children are getting the opportunities they need to get a good start in life." Gergen had previously presented Smart Start with the 1998 Innovations in American Government Award in Washington, D.C.

Also participating in the roundtable discussion were Mack Everett, president and CEO of First Union Corporation, Deb Holton of AT&T, Chris Ahearn of Food Lion, Stephanie Fanjul, director of the Division of Child Development, and Karen Ponder, director of the NCPC.

First Union has given $2 million to Smart Start to be distributed over 10 years, and has joined with local Smart Start partnerships to form the Reading First volunteer preschool literacy project. AT&T has partnered with Smart Start to help fund a toll free resource line and guide for parents to talk with childhood experts and find out about Smart Start resources in their communities.

Smart.Net Puts Information for Local Partnerships at Fingertips

When the Smart Start program recently expanded into all 100 counties, the N.C. Partnership for Children (NCPC), which provides oversight for the 83 Smart Start partnerships, found an innovative way to provide technical assistance and resources for the partnerships.

Using technology, the NCPC has now placed the critical information that local partnerships need to do their job at their fingertips. Local Smart Start Executive Directors are able to log on to the Smart Start website (www.smartstart-nc.org), enter a password, and access Smart.Net, which contains the most current Smart Start information and resources.

Smart.Net includes everything from financial forms and reports to frequently asked questions, policy manuals and guides, a photo gallery, press releases, fundraising tips, PowerPoint presentations, and much, much more. This "one stop shopping" site is intended to make finding crucial information as easy and efficient for local Smart Start partnerships as possible.

In addition, the Smart.Net site includes a local partnership exchange — a place in which partnerships can share examples of their publications and projects. Also, the NCPC's Mailbag to the local partnerships, which contains daily news, is available at the click of a button!

Smart.Net is not only a great new way to communicate but it is also more efficient and cost effective for the NCPC. It is estimated that Smart.Net will save the Partnership more than $20,000 in mailing and faxing expenses in the first year.

NCPC will constantly update the site with the latest news and will continue to look for ways to expand the options available for the sites users. Jessica Mollet of NCPC's Public Information Department manages the Smart Start web site and welcomes ideas and suggestions. This new technology was funded by a grant from the Z. Smith Reynolds Foundation.

NCPC also expanded the Smart Start web site to provide more resources and links for parents. The new Parent Resource Guide is now available on line as well as at "Parents Place", a page of links to resources and sites for parents of young children.

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Gov. Hunt Unveils Plan to Get & Keep Good Child Care Teachers

Bonuses, help with health benefits will keep teachers in classroom and improve quality

Gov. Jim Hunt recently announced NC Cares, an initiative that would help North Carolina get and keep good teachers in child care classrooms by expanding two existing programs that provide help with health care costs and salary bonuses to child care teachers who make a commitment to improving their skills.

Hunt announced the new initiative at the Day Care Services Association's Capital Campaign kickoff. Day Care Services Association, which will administer NC Cares and already runs the T.E.A.C.H. (Teacher Education and Compensation Helps) Early Childhood Project has launched a $1 million capital campaign to purchase a new building to accommodate its rapid growth.

"Education is what matters most, and we have spent a lot of effort over the last two years to get and keep the best teachers in our public schools," Hunt said. "It's wrong that same commitment hasn't been made to those who teach our youngest children when we know that the earliest years are the most important."

Right now in North Carolina, more than one-third of child care teachers leave the classroom every year, many because of low wages and few or no benefits. The typical child care teacher makes $6.25 per hour, lives in a family earning less than $25,000 a year, and has not had the opportunity to go to college. About 28 percent of child care teachers have received at least one form of public assistance in the last three years. Only 16% of child care centers pay the full cost of individual health insurance coverage for their employees.

Research has shown a clear relationship between the education level of a child care teacher and a child's success on intellectual and social skills assessments, but without adequate wages and benefits, child care centers have had difficulty getting and keeping good teachers. NC Cares is a two-pronged plan that expands two projects statewide — the T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood Health Insurance Program and Child Care WAGE$ — using federal money to help with health insurance costs and to provide salary supplements to teachers who continue their education, stay in the workforce and whose centers support their efforts.

An estimated 3,000 child care workers will sign up for health coverage in the T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood Health Insurance Program in the first year, and an estimated 5,000 teachers will participate in Child Care WAGE$ to boost their training and salaries. The state's share of the cost will be $3 million, covered with federal money this year and in future years.

The T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood Health Insurance Program, which will begin in 24 counties, will help pay for the cost of health insurance for child care workers in centers or homes

who have at least one teacher enrolled in the T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood Project and improving his or her education. The T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood Project assists teachers, directors and family child care providers in going back to school to receive more education, provides increased compensation with more education, and requires that participants remain in child care for a year following training. The state will pay one third of the cost with federal money; the child care center will pay one third and the worker will pay one third — although the center has the option of paying for its share and the worker's share.

The Child Care WAGE$ program — which is now working in 18 Smart Start partnerships — provides annual bonuses of up to $3,000 for child care teachers who improve their education and who stay in the child care workforce. The teacher must have at least a North Carolina Early Childhood Credential — now required by state law — and continue to work in the same child care center or home to receive the bonus.

For example, in Orange County, where the Child Care WAGE$ program was created five years ago, child care workers who have participated in the program have increased their education level and remained in the field. A five-year follow-up study in the county shows that the percentage of teachers with two- or four-year degrees has increased from 36 percent to 45 percent, and overall turnover rate has dropped to 22 percent, the lowest in the state.

Smart Start is designed to provide child care, health care and family services to all children who need it; about 42% of that now goes for low-income children. Hunt is seeking $81 million this year to expand Smart Start services in all 100 counties.

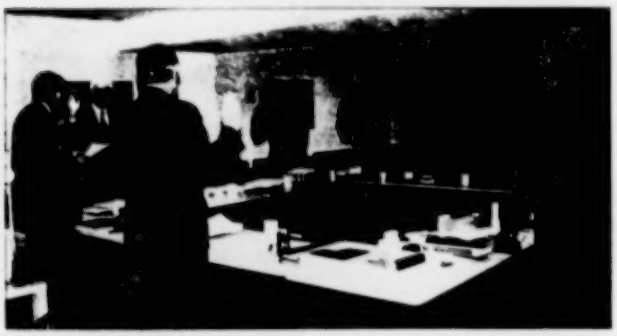
NCPC Board Appointed

The newly appointed N.C. Partnership for Children Board of Directors met for the first time March 12 in Raleigh. Last year's legislation restructured the state board to include 25 members, serving three-year terms instead of a 38 member board. Board members participated in a three-hour Smart Start orientation prior to the meeting to learn about the N.C. Partnership for Children and Smart Start activities statewide. Ashley Thrift has also been re-appointed chairman of the N.C. Partnership for Children board by Gov. Hunt. Thrift has been chair since 1995.

NCPC Board Members include:

Dr. Alton Anderson	physician
Dr. Michael Blackwell	president, Baptist Children's Homes of NC
Carl Boon	County Commissioner, Davie Co.
Dr. David Bruton	secretary, Dept. of Health and Human Services
Patricia Ferguson	board chair, Bertie County Partnership for Children
Betty High Rounds	professor of early childhood at Sandhills Community College
Dr. Olson Huff	pediatric medical director, Ruth & Billy Graham Children's Health Center in Asheville
Theresa Kostrzewa	Government Relations, Wake Co.
Dr. Martin Lancaster	president, NC Community College System
Valeria Lee	Z. Smith Reynolds Foundation
Charles D. Owen	Charles D. Owen Manufacturing
Clark Plexico	vice president, AT&T
Linda Rivers	Cumberland Co.
Ashley Thrift	Attorney, Womble Carlyle Sandridge & Rice
Dr. Michael Ward	superintendent, NC Dept. of Public Instruction
First Lady Carolyn Hunt	Honorary Chair.

Additional members will be appointed by House and Senate leaders in coming months.



New NC Partnership board members are sworn in during spring board meeting.

Smart Start in Action

A New Hanover County example

Collaboration is important in each community to ensure families and children receive the optimum level of service available. One such effort available from the New Hanover County Partnership for Children is between Head Start and the Foster Grandparent Program, which is sponsored by the Department of Aging.

Smart Start sponsors an Assistant Mental Health Coordinator at Head Start to work with children with behavior problems in the classroom. Deanne Newman, the coordinator, arranged for six Foster Grandparents to work one-on-one with 12 children with special needs. The Foster Grandparents go to Head Start every day and meet with Deanne to discuss each child's needs and specific ways to help them. Giving these children the special attention and love they crave is a great boost to their self esteem. Often, the Foster Grandparents build a special relationship with the child's family. Many of these families are young parents who can use guidance from someone with a variety of life experiences.

This program has provided a huge benefit to everyone involved, receiving positive feedback from teachers, staff, parents, children, and grandparents. Numerous teachers have reported improvements in the children with Foster Grandparents. Likewise, the Foster Grandparents have benefited from the program. The grandparents are now excited to spend time with their new "grandchildren". The list of volunteers interested in becoming a Foster Grandparent continues to grow as Head Start prepares for school next year.

Karen Ponder, Executive Director, speaks with board members from New Hanover Partnership about their progress and accomplishments.

Smart Start Collaboration

Smart Start is leading the way to bring collaboration to local communities across North Carolina. Because of Smart Start's efforts, the following changes have been seen across the state:

1. New programs have been created through joint planning and joint funding
2. A reduction in the duplication of efforts has been achieved
3. New funds are being leveraged using Smart Start as the local match
4. Access to services is being increased and program quality is being improved
5. The overall early childhood infrastructure is being strengthened within counties.

How to Recognize Quality Child Care

There is child care, and then there is child CARE. Quality is the major difference. You will breathe easier when you've found someone to hold, hug and play with your child the same way you do...an experienced caregiver who will give your child the nurturing and the skills to learn, grow and discover the world around him/her...a daily partner with you and your child's development.

Your local child care resource and referral agency will help you examine all your options and make an informed choice that is best for your child. Search thoroughly, ask plenty of questions, listen intently - and remember whose future is at stake.

How to Find Quality Child Care

Visit, Visit and Visit Again... Schedule interviews with several caregivers - well in advance of the time you will first need care. Visit each of them more than once - at different times - over a period of several days to get a feel for the rhythm and pace of the caregiver's routine. How does the caregiver interact with the children? Does the caregiver enjoy talking and playing with them?

How does the caregiver respond to a fussy child or resolve conflicts among children? A capable, loving child care provider is in control, but shows flexibility in responding to the needs of different children. Keep visiting from time to time, even after you've selected child care.

Look at Things from Your Child's Point of View

To really understand the child care environment, look at the space from your child's level. Is the home or center child-proofed and clean? Ask yourself the questions your child might ask like, "Do they have toys for me," "Is there a space to put my things," "Are the other children happy and content?"

Less is More

Know what ratios are allowed and what ratio you prefer. In North Carolina, the child-to-caregiver ratio for children up to age one is 5 to one. A low child-to-caregiver ratio is especially important for infants and young toddlers.

Ask Plenty of Questions

Are providers licensed or registered? You'll want to know about your caregiver's qualifications, special training, and past child care experiences - as well as those of other adults who will interact with your child in the child care setting. Don't be afraid to ask specific questions; in fact, the more specific, the better. Have certain topics in mind that cover all your concerns...from the child care facility's expectations of you to your accessibility to your child at all times. Good caregivers will answer your questions easily, openly, honestly. Then ask to speak with the parents of other children in their care. Always check references!

Information and Resources

For more information about how to reach the local child care resource and referral agency in your area, call 1-800-CHOOSE-1, 1-800-246-6731 or the child care resource and referral network at 919-933-5090.

For a listing of child care facilities in your area, contact the North Carolina Division of Child Development web site at: http://www.state.nc.us/DHR/DCD/search/daycare.htm

(From the Smart Start/AT&T Parent Resource Guide - available through local Smart Start partnerships or through the NC Family Health Resource Line at 1-800-367-2229 or on the Smart Start web site at www.smartstart-nc.org)

www.state.nc.us/DHR/DCD/search/daycare.htm

Getting Results for North Carolina's Young Children and Families

Smart Start is designed to ensure that all children in North Carolina enter school prepared for success. It is helping children and families across the state get good, affordable child care, health care and family support.

Smart Start works because local communities and partnerships develop plans and solutions that meet local needs. With Smart Start, communities are organized around the needs of young children - and local partnerships are getting results.

Making a Difference for a Lifetime

Research tells us that the early years are the most important for a child's development. What we do for children in their first five years will make a difference for a lifetime.

Smart Start Accomplishments

Children Are Better Prepared for School

According to studies in Orange and Mecklenburg Counties, children who received Smart Start services were better prepared when they entered school. Scores on kindergarten assessment tests were higher for those children who received Smart Start services. Six more counties will soon have results from similar tests.

Child Care Quality Has Improved

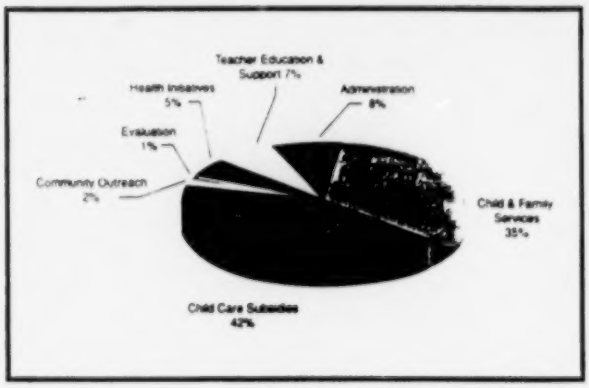
Since Smart Start began it has helped more than 130,000 children get higher-quality child care by participating in a program that received Smart Start quality enhancements.

Research by UNC's Frank Porter Graham Child Development Center shows that Smart Start is increasing the overall quality of child care. In addition, the number of top quality child care centers has increased by more than 60 percent in Smart Start counties.

Teachers Are Better Educated

Before Smart Start in Ashe County, only 5 percent of child care teachers and providers had earned their North Carolina child care credentials. Today, thanks to Smart Start and T.E.A.C.H. (Teacher Education and Compensation Helps) grants, 100 percent of the teachers and providers in the county have completed their training and have earned the child care credential.

How are Smart Start Funds Spent?



Smart Start Statewide Expenditures 1997-98

Teacher Turnover Has Been Reduced

Thanks to Smart Start and T.E.A.C.H. the teacher turnover rate in Orange County has been reduced to 22 percent, the lowest turnover rate in the state. The turnover rate among T.E.A.C.H. participants earning their associates' degrees has fallen to 10 percent annually - compared to 42 percent statewide.

Children Are Healthier

Since Smart Start began it has helped more than 121,000 children get preventive health care.

One pressing health need in almost every county in North Carolina is the lack of dental services for young children, especially those on Medicaid. Smart Start partnerships are making progress by offering dental clinics and finding dentists to volunteer their time and expertise to serve young children.

Before Smart Start began in Jones County, the county had no pediatrician. Today, children are served by a physician through the Health Department, and all pre-kindergarten children in the county have had their hearing screened thanks to Smart Start's effort.

Parents Are Better Educated and Have More Resources

Since Smart Start began it has helped more than 76,668 parents get the education and resources they need.

Thanks to AT&T, parents who call the toll-free number (1-800-367-2229) will receive a new Parent Resource Guide which includes important information about a child's growth, health and safety.

In Forsyth and Davidson counties, Smart Start means home visits and health checks are available to every newborn baby and his or her new parents. In Forsyth and Iredell counties, the parents of every child born in the county receive parenting education materials before they leave the hospital.

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Needs and Challenges of Smart Start Communities

Smart Start is up and running in all 100 counties - but not at full speed. This year 45 counties launched programs and services at a funding level that is 20.8 percent of the counties' full funding need. Overall, Smart Start programs and services are funded at nearly half of the estimated need to fully implement Smart Start so that every child can benefit. There are currently 617,490 children under age six in North Carolina.

North Carolina has one of the highest percentages (67 percent) of working mothers in the country, so child care is a critical need. Child care costs an average of $400 per month so it is critical that quality care is accessible and affordable for working parents. Smart Start is improving the quality of child care and making it more affordable and accessible to families.

It is estimated that there are more than 212,000 young children enrolled in regulated child care every day. It is important that these young children benefit from high quality care. It has been shown that the quality of child care improved in the counties that first started providing Smart Start services.

Almost half of all kindergartners in North Carolina have dental disease. Affordable, preventive care is not an option for many families. Smart Start has made an impact in many partnerships to meet this critical need. Smart Start is also spearheading a dental prevention project in nine western counties through the Appalachian Regional Commission. The project will provide education and include an application of a fluoride varnish on the teeth of young children ages 1-3. Fluoride varnish has recently been made available in the U.S. and North Carolina is leading the nation through the implementation of this project.

Education doesn't begin when a child enters kindergarten. It should begin at birth. The latest research tells us that the first three years of a child's life are the most important for future development and success. The experiences a child receives during those first critical years will make a difference for a lifetime.

What will the expansion funds buy?

Thousands of children and families across the state will benefit from Gov. Hunt's $80 million expansion request for Smart Start. Needs vary from county to county, but each county has developed a plan to meet those needs and additional funding will help these counties fully implement their plans.

Examples of what expansion funding will buy:

- Better child care for thousands of children
- Child care subsidies so thousands of parents can work
- Better wages for child care teachers
- Benefits for child care teachers
- Dental health services for children experiencing significant dental problems
- Access to health services for thousands of children

Smart Start offers New Resources for all Parents

Every parent in North Carolina will now have access to new resources including a statewide toll-free resource line and a comprehensive Parent Resource Guide thanks to Smart Start and AT&T.

The announcement was made in Greensboro during a visit at the Children's Corner, part of Moses Cone Health System.

"With the support of AT&T, Smart Start, First Step, Healthcheck, and Health Choice, we are launching an aggressive statewide parent education campaign through this toll-free number and Parent Resource Guide so that parents across North Carolina can get advice and information about family services in their communities," Hunt said during a roundtable discussion with parents, child care providers, community leaders, and AT&T's Vice President for Government Affair, Clark Plexico.

The toll-free number (1-800-367-2229) is the result of a collaborative effort to provide one place for parents to call with their questions concerning growth, health and safety of their young children. Callers may also use the NC Family Health Resource Line as a gateway to connect with their local Smart Start partnership and other family services. The expansion of the Resource Line is made possible through a contribution from AT&T and a partnership with other state hot lines.

The NC Family Health Resource Line will be publicized across the state through posters, magnets and bookmarks placed in childcare centers, libraries, hospitals, laundromats, and grocery stores. The line is open Monday through Friday from 9am to 7pm. Operators of the resource line are also trained to respond to questions in Spanish.

Parents may also use this line to connect with the state's First Step and Health Check programs and to sign up for the state's health insurance for young children through Health Choice. First Step provides pre-natal and early childhood health information. Health Check provides information on child and adolescent health.

The Parent Resource Guide is a comprehensive booklet that provides detailed information about a child's development through age five. It also includes parenting tips, advice on finding quality child care and information about local services. The book will be available to parents through the NC Partnership for Children, local Smart Start partnerships and some hospitals. The Parent Resource Guide is now available on the Smart Start Web site at www.smartstart-nc.org. A Spanish version of the book will also be available this summer.

"We'd like to thank AT&T for making this service possible for parents across the state," said Ashley Thrift, NC Partnership for Children board chairman. "This is the first time that parents can call just one place to get the information and resources they need."

AT&T's contribution to these parent resources is part of the company's $1 million investment in Smart Start made earlier this year. AT&T employs nearly 2,100 North Carolinians across the state - including Charlotte, the Triad, and Triangle areas.

Smart Start is North Carolina's nationally-recognized early childhood initiative to prepare children to enter school healthy and ready to succeed.

To receive a copy of the Parent Resource Guide call 1.800.367.2229 or access it on the Smart Start web site: www.smartstart-nc.org/parentguide.htm

1.800.367.2229
NC Family Health Resource Line

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What Can I Do to Assist My Child's Intellectual Development?

By Karen W. Ponder
Executive Director

The most current brain research demonstrates that the earliest years of a child's life are the most critical for determining the child's future intellectual development. When a baby is born, her brain has incredible potential that can only be realized through adequate brain stimulation in early childhood. Is there a magic formula for developing high level thinking skills in children? There are some basic things that all parents can do to assure that their children have the greatest capacity for future learning.

Talk to and listen to your child. Even from before birth, we know that babies respond to sound. Newborn infants immediately respond to the voices of their parents. Talk directly to your child from birth. Look directly into their eyes and smile at them. Discuss with your child the world around her. Go for walks together or take trips and talk about what you see. When children learn to talk, listen carefully to what they say. Encourage them to ask questions and to wonder why. Ask what they think or how they feel about something.

Read to your child every day. The best predictors of good future readers are parents who value books, who read in the presence of their children, and who read to their children on a daily basis. When children are old enough, allow them to choose the books you read to them. Repetition is good for them. As soon as your child learns the words in a book, he will help you read it. At first, he will fill in a few words and later he will add longer sentences. These are important beginning steps to learning to read.

Help children experience the world through all their senses. Young children learn best by doing. They have to experience things in order to learn. Give them opportunities every day to smell, hear, see, feel, and taste. Even very young children can memorize facts, but true learning and thinking capacity come, not from rote memorization, but by actively engaged in the world around them. Every day children need opportunities to experiment and explore in a safe environment.

Help children develop a questioning mind. Teach them to wonder why things happen the way they do. Don t always give them the answers directly but guide them in figuring things out. Ask questions such as, "What would happen if?" or "What do you think might happen next?" And then stop long enough to let them find out. Be cautious about responding so quickly that children don t have opportunities to think and figure things out for themselves.

Make learning a positive experience for your child. Sometimes in our efforts to help our children succeed, we put extreme pressure on them for academic achievement. We inadvertently add to the stress they feel in a competitive school environment. Learning is a normal process and brain stimulation should be a natural part of a child's life. The development of cognitive skills begins at birth and you as a parent have a major role in building those skills. So relax, enjoy your child, and learn together.

For more information and resources for parents visit the Smart Start web site at www.smartstart-nc.org. Access "Parent's Place" and the new Parent Resource Guide. If you have any parenting questions call the NC Family Health Resource Line at 1-800-367-2229.

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Local Partnerships Honored at Statewide Conference

Local Smart Start leaders were recently recognized for their contributions to winning the Innovations in American Government Award, a national award given annually by Harvard University and the Ford Foundation. Gov. Jim Hunt, Michael Lipsky of the Ford Foundation and N.C. Partnership for Children board chairman, Ashley Thrift, hosted a reception at the January Smart Start Technical Assistance Conference in Greensboro to recognize the innovative work of local Smart Start partnerships and awarded each county a plaque commemorating the achievement.

Smart Start, North Carolina's nationally-recognized early childhood initiative, received the Innovations in American Government Award because of its innovative approach to meeting the needs of young children and families. More than 1,500 state, local and federal projects applied for the prestigious award.

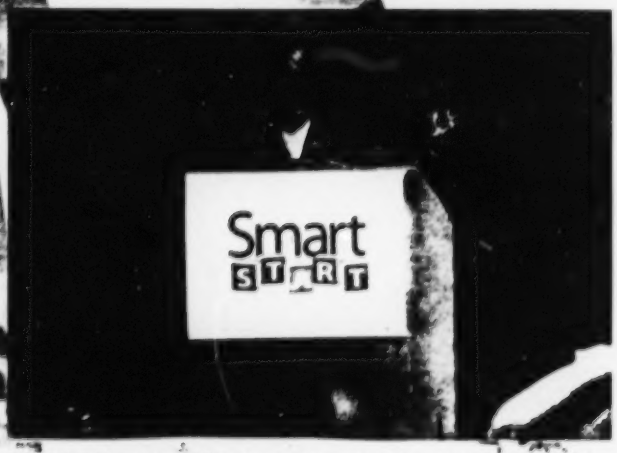
"To win the Ford Foundation's Innovations in American Government Award, a program must go through a rigorous process," Lipsky said. "With more than 1,500 applicants, Smart Start stood out above the rest because it empowers communities to work together to solve its most pressing problems."

David Gergen, editor-at-large of U.S.News and World Report and chairman of the Innovations in American Government Selection Committee, also visited North Carolina recently to see Smart Start in action and meet with state and local business leaders to talk about Smart Start's future.

"Smart Start is such an important program and one I take particular pride in as a native North Carolinian," Gergen said. "This program is not only one of the most innovative programs in the country, it is serving as a model for other communities across North Carolina and the country."

Local partnership leaders were recognized for their efforts in winning the Innovations in American Government Award. Each partnership was presented a plaque by Gov. Hunt, Michael Lipsky of the Ford Foundation and Ashley Thrift.

Helen Blank, a featured speaker at the Smart Start conference, the first statewide conference attracting more than 300 people



National child care expert Joan Lombardi provides the key note address to kick off the conference

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Coming Soon:
Stars in Child Care

Have you ever thumbed through a travel guide to see how many stars or diamond hotels and restaurants received from critics? Or checked the number of stars a movie received in newspaper reviews? Ratings like these can give you more information about choices before you make a decision.

Choosing who will care for your child is one of the most important decisions you make as a parent. Soon there will be a rating system in place to give parents more information about child care providers. All child care centers and family child care homes will receive a license with a rating of one to five stars. One star will mean the provider meets basic licensing requirements for a child care center or home. More stars will mean the provider meets higher standards for better quality child care. A rating higher than one star is voluntary, so providers can set their own goals for what they want their programs to achieve.

Stephanie Fanjul, director of the DCD, the agency that will issue the new licenses, says this will be an improvement over the licenses now displayed in child care centers and homes. "The rated license will be a great tool for parents since it will help them compare different programs and choose the best place for their child."

For example, child care centers now have either an "A" or "AA" license. You can't tell by looking at the "A" license that a higher level of license is possible. (Programs that have an "AA" license meet extra requirements such as having better staff/child ratios and more activities for children.) With the new rated license, parents will know that more levels of licensing exist, and that a four-star program meets higher standards than a two-star program.

Parents will also see how well providers score in three areas that will determine the star rating: program standards, staff education, and compliance history. Providers will earn more points for having a high quality environment for children, for having staff with more early childhood education and experience, and for having a high rate of compliance with child care regulations. The more points a program earns, the more stars it will have on its license.

Providers will begin receiving new rated licenses this year, but will also have time to work toward higher ratings if they choose. The current licenses will gradually be replaced by the new rated ones. By September 2000, all centers and homes will have only the rated licenses. In the meantime, parents can ask their child care provider how they plan to prepare for the new star ratings.

Do you have any questions about the rated license? Call the Division of Child Development at 1-800-859-0829 or visit their web site at www.dhhs.nc.us/dcd/index.htm.

Thousands of Children Benefiting from Smart Start Vision Screenings

Almost 80 percent of preschool-age children nationwide never get an eye exam. Many parents are unaware that one in 20 preschool children has a vision problem, which, if left uncorrected, will worsen and possibly cause permanent loss of sight. Smart Start partnerships in at least 17 counties are making sure preschool children in North Carolina receive testing and treatment for eye problems before entering kindergarten.

Because of Smart Start, more than 37,500 children have received vision screenings in conjunction with Prevent Blindness North Carolina since July, 1998. Of the children screened this year, almost 1,500 have been referred to eye care professionals for follow-up treatment for nearsightedness, farsightedness, astigmatism, cataracts and amblyopia or "lazy eye." It is estimated that 10,500 screenings are planned for the next three months and a total of 2,200 children will be referred for treatment by the end of the school year.

Untreated eye conditions can worsen if not detected and lead to serious problems like learning disabilities or permanent vision damage.

The screening technique uses cameras to take photos of preschoolers' eyes and readings can be made to determine if there is a vision problem. The process is quick, accurate, and intense follow up is completed on each child referred and assistance is offered to any family needing help in obtaining an eye exam or eyewear.

During a recent child care center tour in Charlotte, Speaker Jim Black, an optometrist, joined Gov. Jim Hunt to learn about vision screenings offered through Smart Start and Prevent Blindness. This year, more than 8,400 Mecklenburg County preschoolers received vision screenings at 247 child care facilities because of Smart Start.

"Eighty percent of what a child learns is through his or her eyes," Black told a group of community leaders, teachers and parents. "If problems are not detected early it could have a significant impact on that child's future."

www.smartstart-nc.org

Smart Start Vision: Every child in North Carolina will arrive at school healthy and prepared for success.

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Editor
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Smart Start News

North Carolina Partnership for Children

Fall 1999

Smart Start to Introduce Advocacy, Volunteer Effort

Every day in North Carolina thousands of young children and their families are touched by Smart Start. It has become such a part of early childhood education that families don't often know the ways in which Smart Start has contributed to the development of their young child. If asked what Smart Start is, a parent will usually tell you that it's a program for young children, it's good, and they support it, but they don't always know exactly how it works in their community. As a result, a new campaign to get supporters involved in Smart Start and to promote early childhood issues, will be launched called Champions for Children.

Champions for Children will serve as a year-round grassroots organizing campaign for North Carolina's early childhood issues. The campaign will empower families and supporters of young children to become child activists, recruit and educate new supporters, and create a community-wide network of people committed to improving the lives of young children. This effort will assure that North Carolina continues to make early childhood issues a priority.

Smart Start's goal is to ensure that every child in North Carolina enters school healthy and ready to succeed. In order to meet that goal, it is essential that all spectrums of the community – churches, businesses, child care providers, parents, grandparents, nonprofits, local agencies, government leaders – are at the table and committed to these important issues.

The Campaign will kick off in October as a part of the Smart Start documentary which will air Friday, Oct. 22 at 8 p.m. on WRAL-TV 5 in Raleigh. Participants will be encouraged to sign on to be a Champion and offered a phone number to get more information (1-800-367-2229). A participant will receive a packet of information including key early childhood issues that they agree to support and it will ask them to be a leader and a voice for young children in their communities. As a part of the network, Champions will be encouraged to stay on top of current early childhood events and issues.

~Jessica Mollet

Champions For Children

Smart Start

Smart Start is a comprehensive public-private initiative to help all North Carolina children enter school healthy and ready to succeed. Smart Start programs and services provide children 0-5 access to high-quality and affordable child care, health care, and other critical services.

Smart Start was launched in 1993 by Gov. Jim Hunt. Our goal is to ensure that every child in North Carolina has this opportunity for a brighter future.

www.smartstart-nc.org

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Karen Ponder Named Smart Start Executive Director

The North Carolina Partnership for Children Board of Directors named Karen Ponder the Executive Director of the statewide partnership that oversees Smart Start. Ponder had been serving as the NCPC's Acting Executive Director since October, 1998 and was the former Program Director for the partnership since 1996.

"The board quickly realized that we had a nationally recognized early childhood expert right here," said Dr. Michael Blackwell, chairman of the NCPC Selection Committee of Ponder's long time experience with Smart Start. "Karen has a proven track record of excellent work, a strong commitment to improving the lives of young children and tremendous knowledge of Smart Start at all levels."

Ponder brings to the Partnership 25 years of experience in administration and program development related to early childhood care and education which ranges from teaching young children, directing early education programs, managing a consulting business to working in state government and a nonprofit agency.

She helped develop the Smart Start initiative and served as Smart Start s first Program Manager at the Division of Child Development where she worked with local communities to administer the program.

"I began my work with Smart Start out of a personal observation and deep conviction that young children deserve the best opportunities to be successful," Ponder said. "I am very excited to have this opportunity to help guide Smart Start at a different level. The critical work of the state partnership is supporting local partnerships and helping them to achieve good results for young children. Smart Start is making a tremendous impact across the state and will assure that North Carolina's children have the best start possible."

Active in many early childhood organizations, Ponder is a member of the Governing Board of the National Association for the Education of Young Children and is a Summa Cum Laude graduate of N.C. State University.

Smart Start Wins 2nd National Award

Smart Start has received its second Innovations in Government award this year – the Council of State Governments award. Smart Start received the honor in Kansas City, MO. This award recognizes exemplary state programs and strives to select successful initiatives that can be used as models in other states.

"I'm proud that the Council of State Governments is taking note of what Smart Start has accomplished for young children and families," said Karen Ponder, executive director of the N.C. Partnership for Children, the statewide agency that oversees Smart Start. "Every citizen in North Carolina should be proud that such a reputable and outstanding program is available to serve our state's children."

In October 1998, Smart Start received the Innovations in American Government award from Harvard University, Ford Foundation and the Kennedy School of Government for its successful and unique way of serving children throughout the state. Smart Start remains a nationally-recognized model for early childhood services throughout the nation.

"Smart Start is doing incredible things in North Carolina to bring quality child care, health care and family support to all of North Carolina's families," said Governor Jim Hunt, who launched the program in 1993 and who recently pushed for its expansion into all 100 North Carolina counties. "We are so pleased to receive the Innovations in Government Award and to continue to serve as a model for other states' child care efforts."

Each year the Council of State Governments' Innovations Awards Program receives more than 200 applications from a variety of programs nationwide. After an initial review conducted by Council of State Government policy experts, regional panels of state officials select two award-winning programs from each region. The eight winning programs are honored at a prestigious awards ceremony during Council of State Government's State Leadership Forum.

The Council of State Government's Innovations Awards Program was established in 1986 to bring greater visibility to state programs and policies and to facilitate the transfer of those successful experiences to other states. The Innovations Awards Program is unique, as it is the only national comprehensive awards program that focuses exclusively on state programs and policies and selects winners based solely on evaluations by state government leaders.

www.smartstart-nc.org

Family Support: Fulfilling the Partnership

By Sally Sloop
NCPC Family Support Specialist

The overall nurturing and well-being of young children places great emphasis on the need to understand the importance of their families. A core feature of Smart Start's mission is to address the diverse needs of and support for families as central to a child's quality of care and ongoing development. Sometimes implementing these concepts known as "Family Support" seems difficult to implement and designing measurable outcomes is challenging as well.

Family Support is a philosophy of care and understanding that embraces such areas as social justice, cultural democracy, family empowerment and family-centered care to name a few. Family Support begins when family members are included from the very start to help define needs and design plans. There are many resources available to local partnerships to better understand family support concepts, their importance in creating community-based programs and ways to effectively measure the impact of family support activities

North Carolina's millenium families are a rich tapestry of composition with wide ranges of need. To put it simply, parenting has become increasingly difficult...but not impossible. Families are empowered when they have access to resources and information enabling them to take action to improve the quality of life of their children, their families and overall community life. Children are well served when their families are perceived as strength-based decision-makers. Families who experience such support and opportunity often become the influence that leads others, guiding legislators and community leaders to understand and hence create policy changes. Given a chance, family members can become the leadership we dream of having in our communities.

The N.C. Partnership for Children endorses a multitude of Family Support initiatives and encourages local programs to utilize a diverse range of resources and organizations. Included below is a very brief sampling of some of North Carolina's many family support services and opportunities. It is by no means an exclusive list but rather an avenue to get started.

NC Family Resource Coalition
contact: Laura Weber 336-288-9264 Among its activites, NC FRC sponsors statewide training for the Family Support Training and Credentialing Intiative. The Family Support Credential is skills-based and includes a field practice component.

Family Support Network of North Carolina 1-800-852-0042
www.med.unc.edu/commedu/familysu FSN supports approximately 20 statewide community-based Parent-to-Parent programs. Through one-one-one matching, these programs support families who have children at risk for or with special needs and the professionals who work with families. The Central Directory of Resources (CDR) of the Family Support Network is a comprehensive database of information and referral about such issues as developmental disabilities, chronic illness and behavioral disorders. A Spanish line is included through the 1-800 number.

NC-PEN (North Carolina Parenting Education Network)
Contact: Karen DeBord State Extension Specialist, Child Development 919/515-2770 NC-PEN is working to build the field of parenting education in NC with a focus on partnerships between parents and childcare providers, teachers and parent educators. A quarterly newsletter is published and collaborative planning team is designing future activities. To learn more about NC-PN access its new website: www.ncpen.org

NC Early Intervention Library
Contact: Clara Hunt 828/433-2670 The North Carolina Early Intervention Library houses a large collection of early intervention and early childhood materials. These print and video materials are available for loan to parents and professionals in North Carolina. Parents and agencies unable to make long-distance calls can access the library by calling the Family Support Network at 1-800-852-0042

NC Division of Public Health: Parenting Education Consultation (Maternal and Paternal Related issues)
Contact: Sheila Bazemore 919/715-3422 Effective parenting education materials, consultation, training and presentations are available upon request from the state office. Parenting Education classes are offered through many local health agencies.

North Carolina Interagency Coordinating Council (NC-ICC)
Contact: Karen Chester Div. of Child Development 919/662-4543
The NC-ICC "for Children from birth to five with disabilities and their families," among many functions, advises and assists various state agencies in planning, implementing and evaluating services. The ICC operates through a federal mandate which requires family representation. Local ICC's operate in all one hundred North Carolina counties and are an important means for families to access direct services as well as participate in leadership roles. Often LICC's can provide stipends to better encourage family participation.

Parent Leadership Development Project
Contact: Susan Valiquette or Liz Rodriguez 1-877-265-0071 Frank Porter Graham Child Development UNC-Chapel Hill
This project is recruiting parents of young children with disabilities to provide regional training opportunities where parent leadership skills are enhanced by building on each parent's interests and needs. Stipends are provided.

All Together Now
Contact: Molly Weston Editor, Partnerships for Inclusion 919/966-0059 Frank Porter Graham Child Development Center UNC-Chapel Hill ATN is North Carolina's collaborative early childhood education magazine promoting quality education for all children- those with and without special needs. The magazine includes a range of articles for both parents and professionals as well as an extensive training calendar.

National Family Support Information
Visit these web sites for further information on training materials, library resources, conferences and Family Support resources.

Family Resource Coalition of America - www.frca.org

National Parenting Education Network - http://npen.crc.uiuc.edu

N.C. Insurance Plan Helps Children Start School Healthy

Parents across the state can help their children start the school year off right by enrolling them in a state sponsored insurance program designed for working families. NC Health Choice for Children can provide coverage to uninsured children whose parents make too much money to qualify for Medicaid but are unable to afford private insurance. A family of four making up to $33,400 may qualify for the program. There are also deductions for child care, child support, and work related expenses.

"Children enrolled in the program are going to get the ongoing, preventative health care they need," Tom Vitaglione, chief of the Children and Youth Section said. "Kids who are healthy are ready to succeed in life. This is a good start."

Governor Jim Hunt launched NC Health Choice last October to provide health insurance to the state's working families.

Uninsured North Carolina residents under the age of 19 who do not qualify for Health Check (Medicaid) may be provided with a wide range of benefits. These include well checkups and sick visits; hospitalization; dental care, including fillings, x-rays and sealants; vision care, including glasses; hearing care with hearing aids, if needed; prescription drugs; therapies, including mental health; and care for children with special needs.

Applying for NC Health Choice is easy. All parents need to do is fill out a two page application form and mail or bring it to their local department of social services. All applications are screened for Health Check and NC Health Choice. Some families, depending on income, may have to pay an enrollment fee of $50 per child, but no more than $100 per family each year that children are enrolled.

Families can pick up an application at their local health department or department of social services. To find out other places in a county where applications are available or to receive one in the mail, families can call NC Family Health Resource Line at 1-800-367-2229.

1.800.367.2229
NC Family Health Resource Line

Study Shows Smart Start Boosting School Readiness

A new six-county study of Smart Start has found the program helps boost children's thinking and language skills when compared with those of children not connected with the effort.

Researchers from Frank Porter Graham say they found statistically significant and meaningful improvements in Smart Start children's preparedness. "For example, 17 percent of children not attending Smart Start centers had low cognitive skills but only 9 percent of children who attended Smart Start centers had low skills," said study director Dr. Donna Bryant, a researcher at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill's Frank Porter Graham Child Development Center. "On the behavior measure, 18 percent of children not attending Smart Start centers had behavior problems whereas only 10 percent of Smart Start children did."

These results were found for children who attended centers that received Smart Start assistance that was directly related to classroom quality. The study also showed that not all Smart Start activities were effective in improving children's school readiness, however, even if they were useful for other reasons such as CPR training.

The independent, state-funded UNC-CH analysis involved gathering information about the thinking, language and social skills of 508 kindergartners in the fall of 1998. Of the 508 children, 294 attended day-care centers participating in only a few or no Smart Start quality improvement efforts and were termed "comparison" children, Bryant said. Of the 214 Smart Start preschoolers, 142 attended centers that received Smart Start help directly related to quality improvement and 72 attended centers that received other supportive types of technical assistance.

When all 214 Smart Start children were evaluated against all comparison youngsters, the two groups did not differ, Bryant said. However, the Smart Start "direct" subgroup did show various skills superior to the comparison group.
"The results of this multi-county study support earlier single-county studies of the positive effects of Smart Start on North Carolina children," Bryant said. "They also suggest that Smart Start efforts need to be directly related to improving the quality of child care if they are to have an effect on children's school entry skills.

"In the interest of being comprehensive, local Smart Start partnerships may distribute multiple, diverse services to the child-care community," said Kelly Maxwell, co-director of the study and an FPG researcher. "This approach may not produce the intended improvements in child-care quality or child outcomes. To affect school entry skills, the type – not just quantity - of Smart Start support is important."

-- FPG News Release

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Smart Start van brings communities, families together

By Geelea Seaford
Public Information Officer

Many of us have vivid childhood memories – for me every Wednesday afternoon at 2 p.m. the bookmobile would come to my neighborhood. The bus seemed larger than life and was filled with new and exciting opportunities. The librarian would help me up the stairs and I would enter a world of storytelling, learning and adventure.

In many ways, Carteret and Jones counties have created the same opportunity only now it's a place for parents and children to learn together. Like other Smart Start programs, the Smart Start van was born out of a need for services in remote areas of the county. Small fishing villages line Carteret County's coast where no libraries or child care centers are available to families. The Smart Start van provides the only link to resources in these communities and has become the ultimate outreach tool.

Just like the bookmobile, the Smart Start van, a brightly painted, 30-foot Gulfstream RV, drives into communities each week to the sound of parents and children running to see what it has to offer. For parent meetings, guest speakers are often on board to talk about parenting skills, First Aid and CPR and services offered by local agencies. For children, new games and toys teach them how to get along and share with one another.

The Smart Start van is also responsible for organizing playgroups at area churches for children and parents to attend between the van's visits.

"Our playgroup would not have happened without Smart Start," said Joann Newton, a parent and playgroup participant. "It has been the best thing that could have ever happened to me and my two-year-old son. John wakes up every morning asking, 'Is today Tuesday?'

"The group has enabled me to get to know other parents that I would not have met otherwise. Most of the children will be going to school together; they've made friendships that will last forever," Newton said.

Parents can't just drop their children off at the Smart Start van and leave. It is a time when parents can concentrate on their child without being interrupted.

"No matter how much we love our children or even if we are stay at home parents, it is hard to find uninterrupted time with our children," said Lisa Knowles, outreach coordinator for the Carteret County Partnership for Children. "The Smart Start van gives parents that opportunity without interruption from the telephone or laundry."

Since participating in the Smart Start playgroup, Newton has become more involved in Smart Start and was recently appointed to the Carteret County Partnership for Children board of directors as a parent representative.

"Now I feel can do something for all of the children of Carteret County. I have something to contribute," she said.

The Smart Start van is a result of a $55,000 grant from Wachovia and $10,000 from Carolina Power and Light. It travels throughout Carteret and Jones counties, alternating every six months between the two counties. After just four months of operation, Knowles, Newton and parents can see a definite improvement in every child's socialization skills; the skills that will follow them well past kindergarten.

"The children believe the van belongs to them," Knowles said. "Seeing the smiles on their faces and the way they have blossomed, I know I have the best job in the world."

If you'd like more information about the Smart Start van, contact Lisa Knowles at the Carteret County Partnership for Children at 252.728.5453 or the Jones County Partnership for Children at 252.448.5272.

To receive a copy of Smart Start's Parent Resource Guide call 1.800.367.2229 or access it on the web site: www.smartstart-nc.org/parent guide.htm

Business Partners

Lowe's Invests in Quality Child Care for Wilkes County Children

An investment made by Lowe's Companies has become a win-win situation for both the company and the children and families in Wilkes County.

The home improvement retail giant, based in North Wilkesboro, North Carolina, made a commitment last year to quality child care for the community. As part of that commitment, the company has pledged more than $500,000 to the expansion, upgrade, and accreditation of a child development center on the campus of Wilkes Community College. As a result of their support, the center has doubled its capacity to 124 children and developed a new outdoor play area. Staff has increased from 21 to 39 in the expanded facility and the education requirements for full-time lead teachers have been increased to a two-year associate degree. As a result of these changes, the center is now eligible for accreditation from the National Association for the Education of Young Children. Lowe's has committed to subsidizing operating deficits at the center for at least the next three years to assure that tuition at the center remains reasonable while still expending the funds necessary to maintain the highest standards of quality.

The center will give priority to Lowe's employees for access to up to half of the spaces in the expanded facility. This assures the company that their employees will have access to affordable, quality child care in the upcoming years as well as benefiting other families in the community who want to obtain the best possible care for their children during the work day.

Lowe's Companies is to be applauded for their commitment to quality, affordable and accessible child care. They are helping to make Smart Start's goals for young children a reality in Wilkes County. We urge other companies across North Carolina to consider a similar investment. It is a win-win for the company, its employees, and the communities where they are based.

Smart Start & R. J. Reynolds: Partners for the Future in Bertie County

The day after her 17th birthday, a young mother in Bertie County breathed a sigh of relief. The young mother would be able to return to high school to pursue her education as she had just been awarded a scholarship for her child to attend a local licensed child care center. Thanks to an R.J. Reynolds grant to the Bertie County Partnership for Children, child care scholarships are provided to teen parents like this one who would like to continue their education but are in need of financial assistance for child care. Now mother and son are being given the opportunity for a good education and better opportunities for the future.

The R.J. Reynolds Child Care Scholarship Program focuses on teen parents in Bertie County. By providing a scholarship for their children to attend child care, the program aims to provide a future for young mothers who have previously left school as a result of a pregnancy. Mothers participating in this program are now able to return to high school, are participating in a GED program, or are attending the local community college. The program has achieved exciting results and has given hope for a brighter future for young mothers and their children.

Public and Private Sectors Work Together in Ashe County

In recent months, the Ashe County Commissioners announced that they would donate a high school in West Jefferson, North Carolina to be used as a multi-purpose site for services for children and families in the county. This generous support from local government has now resulted in additional support for Smart Start in the region. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services has announced that it will award a grant of $518,000 (over the next five years) to the Ashe County Partnership for Children for its family literacy project. The project will be operated in the new facility. That announcement was quickly followed by a grant of $30,000 from First Union and the Shelton Foundation to support renovations of the facility.

Plans for use of the old Ashe Central High School has generated a great deal of excitement in the community with civic leaders working together to make the most of this wonderful opportunity. At the present time, it is anticipated that the building will house a family resource center where county residents can access a variety of resources and services for children and families. In addition, licensed, high quality child care space will be offered to persons attending programs in the building. Other programs to be offered include child care resource and referral services, parent education programs, a MOM's support group, and literacy programs. Transportation will also be provided to famil with difficulty accessing these services.

The new facility is scheduled to be up and running by the end of this year.

North Carolina's Rated License Standards: "Extra Credit" for More Staff Education

[This is the first in a series of three articles submitted by the Division of Child Development on the new "rated license" for child care facilities. Each article will focus on one of the three areas in which child care facilities are rated.]

Child care teachers and directors work hard to provide high quality care, and now parents will know it too with the new rated license. Parents will be able to tell at a glance the level of quality care provided by looking at the number of stars on the new license (see graphic). A rating of "one-star" lets parents know that the program meets North Carolina's minimum standards for child care. Licenses with 2-5 stars represent higher levels of quality, with five stars signaling to parents that the center offers the highest level of quality care available.

The number of stars on a license is based on how well the center performs in three areas: staff education standards, program standards, and compliance history. A center can earn a maximum of five points in each area. The number of stars awarded to a center is based on the total number of points scored; for example, a total of 14-15 points must be earned for a five-star license. So how can a center earn the most stars possible? One way is to increase staff education and training.

Studies have shown that the more education and experience a child care center director has, the greater the impact on the center because of improved management, lower staff turnover, and better classroom practices. Child care teachers with more early childhood education and experience interact better with children and create more enriching classroom experiences. A recent national study by four universities, including the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, confirmed those findings. It showed that children whose teachers had higher qualifications did better both academically and behaviorally at least into early elementary school.*

Child care centers that encourage staff to get more education and experience can earn more points toward their star ratings. The number of points a center can earn for staff education is based on:

- the education and experience levels of the director
- the number of teachers with child care credentials
- the number of teachers with more early childhood education and experience

The rated license education standards for family child care homes and school-age child care programs are slightly different, but based on similar factors.

The state is helping child care providers meet these new standards. One way is through the T.E.A.C.H. (Teacher Education And Compensation Helps) Scholarship Program. Child care centers can sponsor their staff to participate in T.E.A.C.H., which helps pay for community college and university courses.

State of North Carolina
Department of Health and Human Services
Division of Child Development

Three Star Child Care License

ABC CHILD CARE CENTER
123 ANYWHERE ST
RALEIGH, NC 27777

In each area rated, this facility earned:
Staff Education: 2 out of 5 points
Program Standards: 2 out of 5 points
Compliance History: 5 out of 5 points
Total: 9 out of 15 points

ID Number: 03991533
Type of Facility: Center

T.E.A.C.H. also offers bonuses to teachers who finish certain levels of education and who keep working in child care.

Just as North Carolina has supported better public schools in recent years through better salaries for public school teachers, the state is making a commitment to its child care teachers through "NC CARES" (Committed to Attracting and Retaining Educated Staff). NC CARES is a part of the overall T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood Project, which offers wage supplements and partially state-supported health insurance to teachers in child care programs that promote and support staff education.

The state also recognizes that higher-quality child care programs can cost more to operate, so it will pay quality bonuses to child care programs in addition to the regular fee for child care. For example, a low income working family can receive help from the state in paying for the cost of their child's care. If that child is enrolled in a one-star center, the state will pay a basic rate for care. However, if the center has a rating of two or more stars, a quality bonus from the state is added to their basic rate. On top of that, the center might be eligible for another quality bonus from the local Smart Start partnership based on their star rating. The amount paid for the child's care would increase with each star added to the center's rating.

To learn more about the rated license, visit DCD's web site at www.dhhs.state.nc.us/dcd/dcdpage.htm. You can also contact the Division directly at 1-800-859-0829 (in-state) or 919/662-4527. For more information about the T.E.A.C.H. Scholarship Program and NC Cares, call Child Care Services Association at 919/967-3272.

* "The Children of the Cost, Quality, and Outcomes Study Go to School." The CQO Study Team. Frank Porter Graham Center, UNC-CH. 1999

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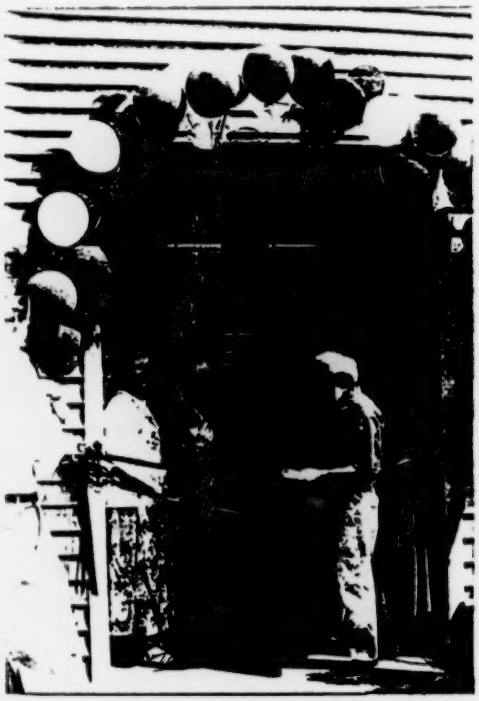
Smart Start in Action

The photo and articles on pages 8-9 were submitted by local Smart Start partnerships.



Smart Start officials celebrate a ribbon-cutting of the Webster Enterprises Child Development Center

Union County Names Child Care Teacher of the Year

The Union County Partnership for Children named the Union County Child Care Teacher of the Year during its first annual awards banquet. Finalists were recognized from four categories: Infant/Toddler, Pre-School, After-School, and Home-Care Provider.. The overall winner, Mary McAlhaney from Wesley Chapel Child Development, was given a plaque and $500. Winners in each of the categories received $250 and a plaque. A plaque was also presented to the owner/director of the center.

Dr. Allen Mallory, keynote speaker, presented great insight about the joy of working with young children and their daily encounters that every child care professional experiences. Special thanks to the UCPC Child Care Committee: Chairperson Donna Griggs, Hannah Riffle, Steve Ramsey, Linda MacConnachie, Richard Heins, Rhonda Roach, Susan Taylor, Jan Nash, Deview Hudson and Lillie Allen.

Webster Enterprises Child Development Center Working Together...One Foot At A Time

From the Region A Partnership for Children

In October 1997, three non-profit organizations in Jackson County came together to discuss a very important issue: how to reduce the child care waiting list in Jackson County? The waiting list always had at least 100 children on it because of a lack of child care "slots." The Region A Partnership for Children along with Southwestern Child Development Commission and Webster Enterprises began the conversation that has resulted in a beautiful new child care center located on the campus of Webster Enterprises. This center was christened on July 16 and was serving 60 infants and toddlers by August 16th. How did it happen?

We first developed a plan for a new center. We had land donated by Webster Enterprises, and staff ready to devote time and energy to raising money and designing the new center. We then decided how much money we would need to raise. Our original estimate was $492,000 to build a brand new building. Then we sought volunteers to serve on a community fund raising committee. The first grant was written to the Jackson County Government for $30,000 from the 1998 county budget and a request to ask for $45,000 from the 1999 budget. They awarded us the $75,000. This lead gift allowed us to raise the next big grant from the Janirve Foundation for $100,000. The United States Department of Agriculture Office of Rural Development also made a commitment for $112,000 in a grant. Another $20,000 was donated by Duke Power Foundation, and the Community Foundation of Western North Carolina awarded the Partnership a $3,000 equipment grant.

The community fund raising committee, chaired by Laura Pennington, began raising money one dollar at a time at Wal-Mart, Arby's, McDonald's, and area banks. And a campaign was born based on the original budget that calculated one square foot of the building cost $67. Individual and business donations were sought through a direct mail campaign and anyone contributing $67 or more would have their name permanently displayed in the childcare center. How much did we raise? The budget kept growing and growing as the true costs to build this center became known. It became obvious we would need a total of $732,129 in gifts, grants, and in-kind donations. Every penny needed for the new child care center was raised through grants, individual, business, and in-kind donations. The community fund raising committee alone raised more than $26,000.

This community came together to meet the needs of infants, toddlers, and their families in Jackson County. It has been an amazing and wonderful experience to be a part of something so widespread and so worthwhile in our community.

Partnership plays role in Rocky Mount's All-America City victory

Rocky Mount–Staff members of the Down East Partnership for Children were part of the victorious delegation who made the presentation that snagged the All-America City award for the City of Rocky Mount.

For a community to be named an All-America City, it must be able to demonstrate successful resolution of community issues through collaborative effort. Communities must list three projects where local business, government, and nonprofit organizations have worked together to tangibly improve the lives of their community's residents. The Down East Partnership for Children, a nonprofit organization which administers Smart Start in Nash and Edgecombe Counties, was chosen to demonstrate how the lives of children are being made better through collaboration and a community-wide effort to heighten the quality of life and education in an area where children have posted below-average educational skills.

Included in the presentation were features on DEPC's family resource centers, information exchange, Family Night Out and involvement with Edgecombe County Health Department's lead abatement program and Edgecombe County Memorial Library's Read Me a Story program.

Judges with the All-America City Award have said that the Partnership's collaborative spirit and dedication to children were deciding factors in the choice of Rocky Mount as an All-America City.

The All-America City Award, the oldest and most respected community recognition program, has been presented annually since 1949 by the National Civic League. The distinction rewards excellence in local efforts to strengthen the civic infrastructure of America's communities and honors those cities whose citizens work together to identify and tackle community-wide challenges and achieve uncommon results.

Parent's Place

For parenting information and resources visit the Smart Start web site at www.smartstart-nc.org. Access "Parent's Place" and the new Parent Resource Guide. If you have any parenting questions call the NC Family Health Resource Line at 1-800-867-2229.

Forsyth Partnership gives children a "Jump Start"

One third of all kindergartners in Forsyth County arrive at school unprepared and in need of remedial assistance. Many poor children go to kindergarten, never having experienced a preschool learning environment. As a result, both the schools and children are forced into a difficult "catch up" situation. Forsyth Early Childhood Partnership and The Winston-Salem/Forsyth County Public School System created Jump Start to change this.

In 1997, the Winston-Salem/Forsyth County Public School System received a Smart Start Grant to conduct a summer program that was designed to give an introductory school experience to children preparing to enter kindergarten. The program was intended to serve those who had not had previous preschool experience, and also included children who demonstrated a lack of school readiness on a Pre-K screening such as the Learning Accomplishment Profile-Developmental (LAP-D).

Jump Start has grown each year since 1997 and during the summer of 1999, the "Jump Start" program was repeated in 23 elementary schools.

The overall emphasis of Jump Start was to provide a warm, positive, developmentally appropriate experience for young children. The goals of the program were to: 1)increase the comfort of children in separating from parents; 2)establish positive relationships between school and parents; 3)introduce basic readiness skills (e.g., use of school tools, following directions, etc.); 4)introduce expected group behavior; 5)introduce children to the school environment and routines.

Although a short term program with half day classes, the impact of the program has proven long term and long lasting. In a survey of teachers after participation in the 1998 Jump Start program, 100% reported that it was "very useful" in orienting students to the school building, personnel and routine, introducing students to expected classroom behavior, and introducing the basic skills needed in school. 93% reported that Jump Start was successful in promoting a positive relationship between parents and the school and 80% reported that the program increased the child's comfort with separation from their parents. Even with the strength of these results, evaluation increases from the 1999 program are expected to be even stronger.

In just three years, Jump Start has shown its many benefits. Once Jump Start students entered school in the fall, their assigned teachers noted that they were often the class leaders with few disciplinary problems compared to other children without a preschool experience who did not participate.

1999 Local Smart Start Award Winners

Collaboration Award: Forsyth Early Childhood Partnership

The Forsyth Early Childhood Partnership is recognized for its achievement in building a strong community collaboration in Forsyth County. The partnership works with many different organizations in many different ways, combining resources to utilize funding for children and families more efficiently and effectively. Projects like the Living Water Non-Denominational Fellowship is a collaboration between five different churches of different denominations is an example of Forsyth's success. The project has merged funding and volunteers and has been successful in securing additional support from numerous foundations, companies, county agencies, and individuals. The center includes a family resource center, child development center, on-site prenatal clinic, on-site dental clinic and family support services.

Family Support Award: Forsyth Early Childhood Partnership
Service Provider: Catholic Social Services
Program: Hand to Hand

The Hand to Hand program focuses on first-time pregnant and parenting teens. It's goal is to decrease the number of repeat pregnancies, increase completion of education by teen parents, increase use of and access to maternal and infant services at an early stage for a pregnant teen or new teen parent, and strengthen the parenting skills of teen parents. Since its inception, the program has made a tremendous impact. Key statistics from 1998 include:

- Repeat pregnancy was less than 3% in Forsyth County in 1998. (The national rate was 60%.)
- 90% of participants were either attending school or employed in 1998. (The national rate is 55%.)
- Infant mortality has been reduced to 0 among participants.
- 100% of the participant's children have received all of the necessary immunizations.

Child Care Quality: Forsyth Early Childhood Partnership
Service Provider: Work/Family Resource Center
Program: Continuum of Professional Development

The Work/Family Resource Center provides child care resource and referral services to parents as well as providing support, technical assistance and educational opportunities for child care providers in the community. The Continuum of Professional Development program has three primary goals: 1) to improve the quality of care provided to children in family child care homes; 2) to increase the levels of education and professional development among family child care home providers; and 3) to educate parents about the importance of quality child care in their homes, in continuously improving both their own professional education and the quality of care they provide to children.

Child Care Accessibility Award:
Orange County Partnership for Young Children
Service Provider: Child Care Services Association
Program: Expanded Child Care Referral Services

The "Expanded Child Care Referral Services" program is coordinated by Child Care Services Association of Chapel Hill. The program is dedicated to ensuring that families have access to child care referral information and child care subsidies. The project makes child care services more accessible through more convenient hours and locations and through provision of Spanish translation and interpretation services provided by bilingual staff. In addition, families with special needs (including families experiencing financial, emotional, or medical stress, families who live in rural areas and families isolated by language or cultural barriers) receive additional services until they find the child care they need.

Child Care Affordability Award:
Region A Partnership for Children
Service Provider:
Southwestern Child Development Commission
Program: Social Worker and Parent Counselor Project

Through the Social Worker and Parent Counselor Project, families in Region A now have access to a seamless system for child care subsidy. Through the Southwestern Child Development Commission, families in the seven-county area of Region A as well as the Qualla Indian Boundary can have access to all available funding for child care subsidy. This includes funding from Smart Start, Division of Child Development, community colleges, mental health agencies, etc. Social workers will meet with them to determine their specific needs and the available resources and will then work with them to access the resources most appropriate to them. Through this collaboration, they work with 142 child care centers and family homes and serve 5000 children and their families.

Health Award: Rutherford County Partnership for Children
Service Provider: Cleveland County Health Department and Dr. Patricia Stainback
Program: Dental Care for Kids

The Rutherford County Partnership for Children has found an innovative way to provide dental care to the young children of its county through collaboration with a neighboring county health department and a local private dentist. Under the plan developed by these agencies, education, prevention and dental treatment are being provided to all Medicaid-eligible and indigent children in Rutherford County. Smart Start has provided the seed money to start this program which will be sustained in the long-term through Medicaid funding. The Cleveland County Health Department assists the project by processing all Medicaid reimbursements. Since its inception in 1998, the number of participants has steadily risen. It is estimated that approximately 600 children will receive treatment under this program by the end of FY 1999. The project is now being expanded to Polk and McDowell Counties to offer their children this opportunity.

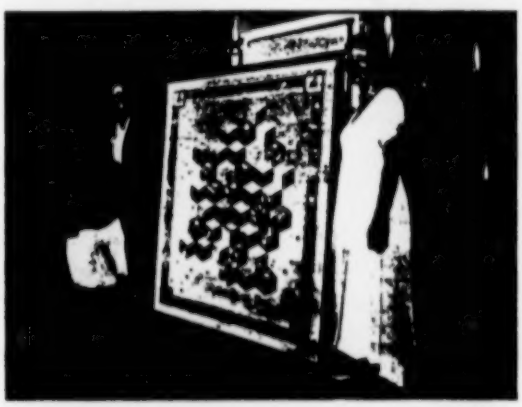
Crites Receive Local Champion Award

Nominated by Region A Partnership for Children

Marsha and Lee Crites are the recipients of the 1999 Local Champion Award for Smart Start. The award was presented to the Crites by Gov. Jim Hunt during the Annual Smart Start Awards Dinner. Marsha and Lee Crites led the effort to bring Smart Start to Region A. They pulled together the first planning committee, assisted in writing the application for funding, spearheaded the first regional needs assessment, and worked to bring seven counties and the Qualla Boundary under one partnership rather than seven separate ones. And the list goes on.... Marsha served as Chair of the first planning team for Smart Start. Lee also served as the chairman of the Board of Directors of the Region A Partnership for Children. Many thanks to the Crites for their efforts on behalf of young children in Region A.

Governor's Corporate Champion for Children Award Presented to IBM

IBM has pledged to invest more than $1 million in Smart Start over the next three years. This investment represents IBM's commitment to young children, commitment to North Carolina, and commitment to quality child care. The majority of the funds will be used to provide TEACH scholarships in 82 North Carolina counties. In addition, funds will be provided to support NAEYC accreditation and computer stations for children in child care centers in five counties. IBM's Ted Childs received the award on behalf of the company and also presented the keynote address for the Smart Start Awards.



Artists Beth Lake and Ruth Whitefield present Smart Start with a special creation they designed. Posters of the artwork are available at NCPC!

Smart Start Awards '99

Lee and Marsha Crites are presented the Local Champion Award by Gov. Jim Hunt.

IBM's Ted Childs presents the keynote address.

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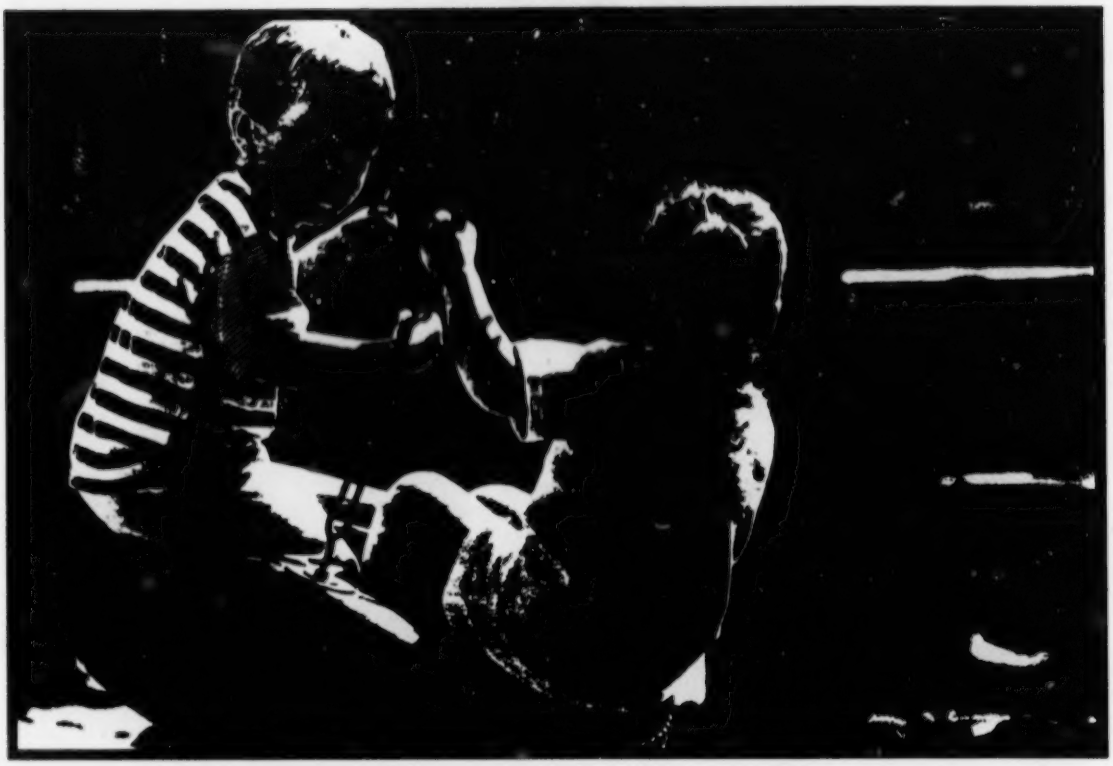
www.smartstart-nc.org



Smart Start Vision: Every child in North Carolina will arrive at school healthy and prepared for success.

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